UNDERSTANDING SELF-IDENTITY AMONG YOUNG WOMEN ACROSS INDIA

January 25, 2022

About the study

Sattva recently conducted a research study, in collaboration with one of our clients to support them in designing their gender-focused social impact programme. This programme was focused on **helping young women understand their identities and achieve their future aspirations and dreams.**

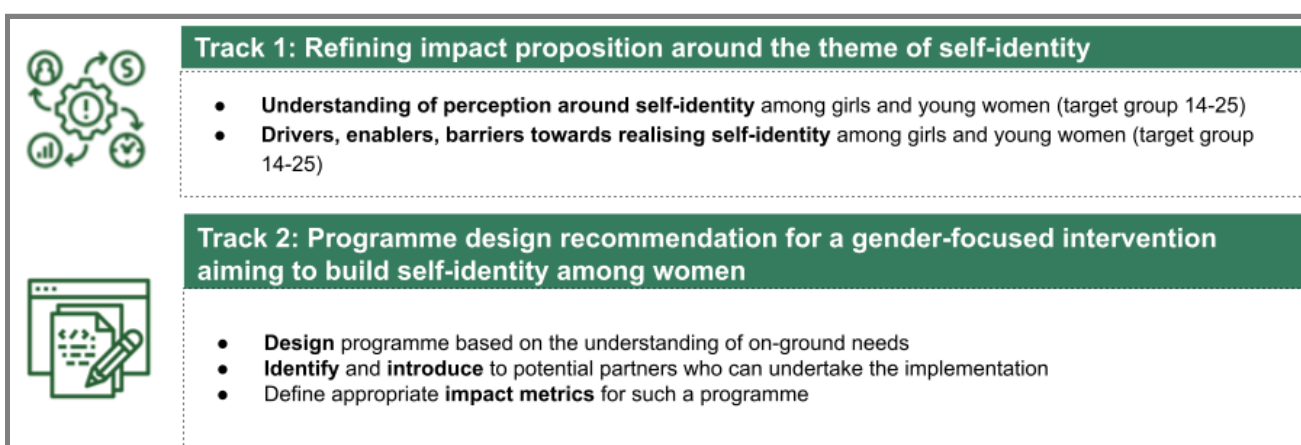The study was divided into two tracks, as presented in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1:Two-track approach to undertake this study

Towards Track 1 Sattva conducted a primary research study with:

- **789 girls** (age 14-18) and women (age 19-25) across **4 regions of India**—North, South, East and West
- **16 experts from reputed NGOs and private organisations** who work on issues of gender and self-identity

Key Insights

Key Insights that emerged from this study are presented in Figure 2 below

Future aspiration for self-identity		**25% girls have limited clarity about their future self-identity**. Amongst those who have clarity, **white-collar and government jobs** emerged as top self-identity aspirations
		Building high self motivation and instilling a growth mindset can unlock diverse self-identity avenues (beyond private and public sector roles) such as pursuing art and entrepreneurship
Levers and barriers towards achieving self-identity		Strengthening peer groups is a key lever to shape women's identities. **Peer group and friends play an important role in finding jobs**, but respondents reported **friend circle as the least important determinant of self-identity.**
		However, from a programme perspective, the organic reach of a programme tends to be limited to siblings and immediate family/ community members. **To influence more than 2-3 women, HUL could embed peer engagement in the programme**
		Soft skills with a focus on English speaking has emerged as the most needed vocational training program across most cities, but it was the least undertaken vocational training programme
		A **hybrid model of engagement** is necessitated by lack of agency on using technology tools, a recurring preference for offline training modes and need for greater mobility for girls

Figure 2: Key Insights from the study

We present a detailed breakdown of each of these insights, with related quotes from the ground and from ecosystem experts; as well as data informing each insight and additional findings below:

1. 25% of girls have limited clarity about their future self-identity and need career counselling support. Amongst those who have clarity, white-collar and government jobs emerged as top self-identity aspirations

Women don't have enough exposure to the kinds of opportunities available. Their limited mobility restricts knowledge of access due to their confined identity attached to their family members
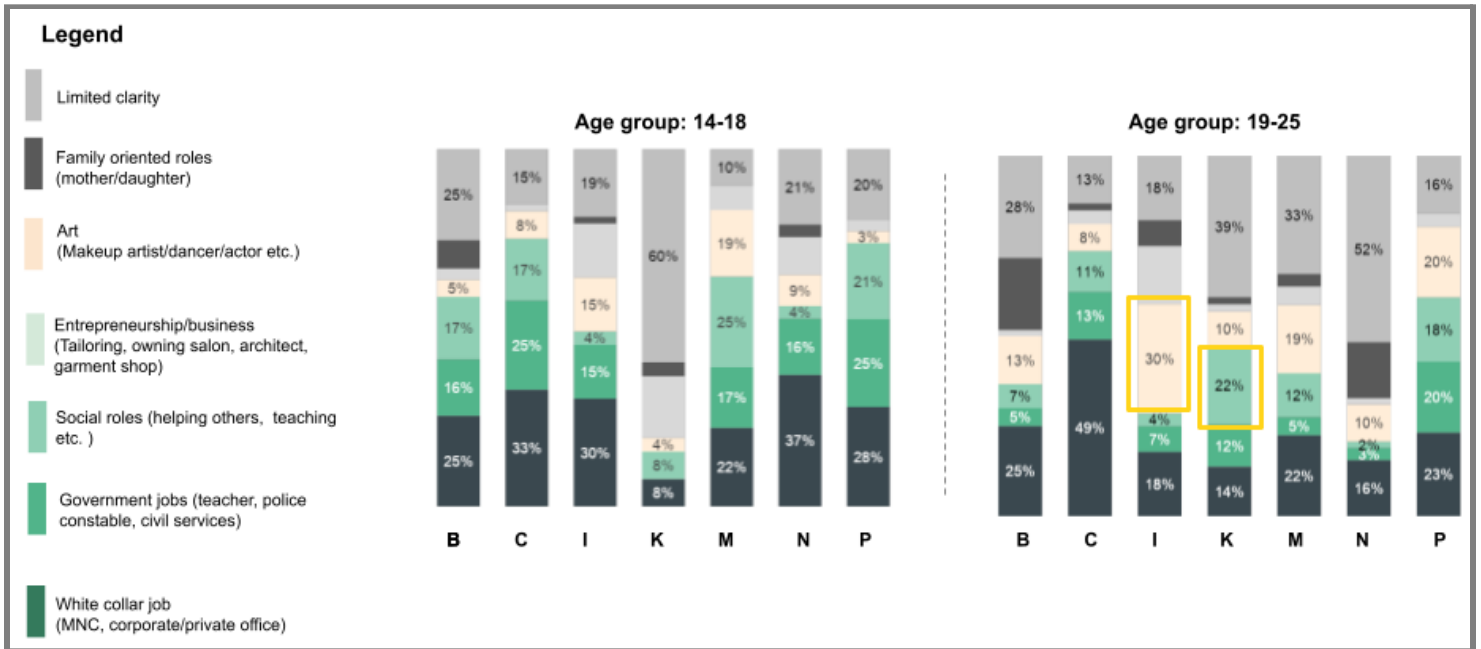
Figure 3: Data representing future self-identity

a. **Chandigarh reported the highest inclination for white-collar jobs, whereas Patna reported the same for government jobs.**

b. The association of future identity with government jobs was higher in the 14-18 age group (16%) compared to the 19-25 age group (9%).

c. **Entrepreneurship in Indore and social roles in Kolkata emerged as main aspirations.**

d. In Bengaluru and Nashik, women reported a higher inclination for family oriented identity in the 19-25 age-group.

2. Building high self motivation and instilling a growth mindset can unlock diverse self-identity avenues (beyond private and public sector roles) such as pursuing art

A lot of girls have hobbies of stitching and even earn small money from it, but they don't have the mindset of growth and even relevant opportunities to tap it as an economic activity
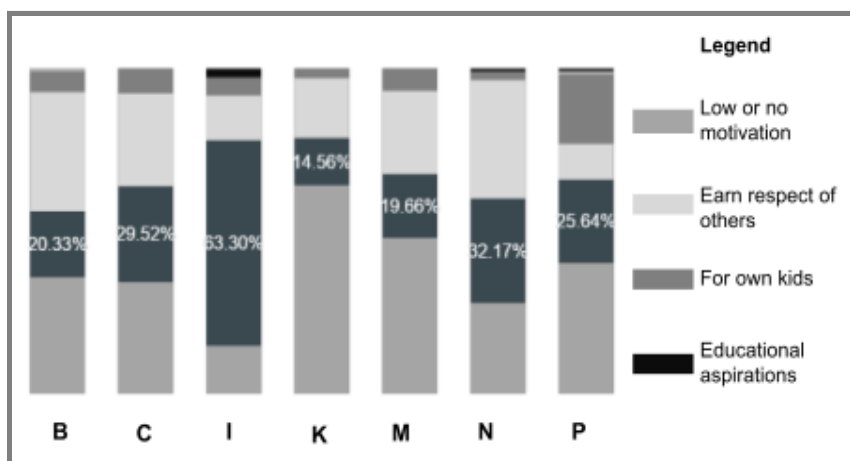
Figure 4: % of respondents who highlighted these motivations behind future self-identity

a. **Girls and women in the western and southern regions have higher self-esteem and self confidence**, compared to other regions.

b. In Indore, association of **self-identity with art** was higher than any other city. **Interestingly, respondents here were also the most self-motivated across cities.**

c. Education from a good college and financial independence through work emerged as factors that would make respondents feel more confident about their goals and aspirations.

d. Women from urban areas stated that education would make them feel more confident about their aspirations, while those from peri-urban areas regarded financial independence as a key factor instilling confidence.

3. Strengthening peer groups is a key lever to shape women's identities. While peer group and friends played an important role in finding jobs, respondents reported friends circle as the least important determinant of self-identity, as depicted in Figure 6 below
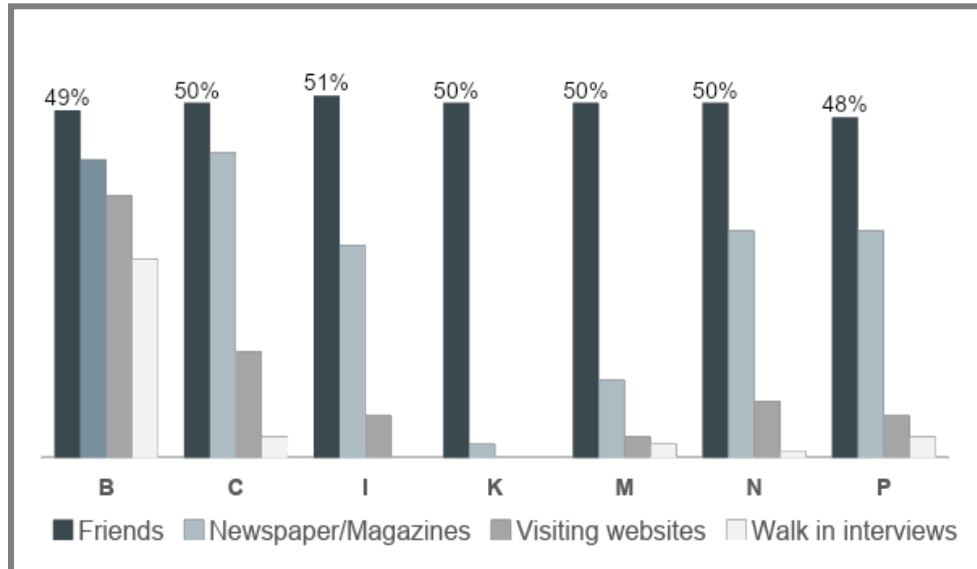
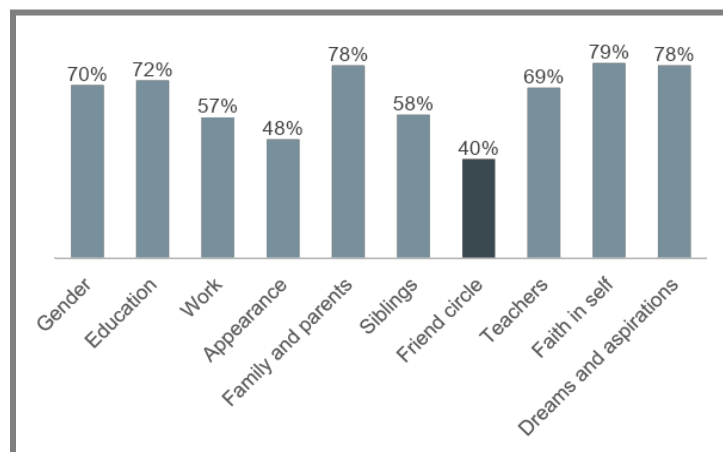Figure 5: % of respondents who used friends circles to acquire jobs

Figure 6: % of respondents who highlighted various factors that influence their self-identity

a. **Girls and women across age groups and geographies (73%) said that having role models that are tangible and relatable is important for them for unlocking their self-identity.** Women from the immediate family had the most influence (38%) followed by women from the environment like their community, schools etc.

b. In terms of opinions about themselves, girls across both age groups took their mother most seriously, followed by their father and themselves. For the 19-25 age group, husbands' opinion

mattered the most after their mother and father.

c. The availability of role models in the surrounding areas was higher in the peri-urban areas (97%) compared to urban areas (67%). On the other hand, respondents from urban areas (54%) had more support from their peer groups to access resources than peri-urban areas (24%).

d. Most girls and women felt that they can inspire their siblings (76%), followed by other girls in their community (63%).

e. 83% would lead by example on how to be confident and have a unique self-identity, and 73% mentioned they would reach out to others to help them understand their identity. **However when it came to actionables like starting a network or guiding others, less than 45% girls/women showed inclination.**

4. Soft skills with a focus on English speaking emerged as the most needed vocational training program across most cities, but it was the least one

	14-18 years	19-25 years
Bangalore	37%	46%
Chandigarh	34%	36%
Indore	30%	26%
Kolkata	41%	41%
Meerut	34%	30%
Nashik	29%	30%
Patna	26%	25%

Soft skills training (English and communication skills)

Support for exam preparation (Govt/Bank/NET/Defence)

Vocational training enabling financial independence (tailoring/beautician etc.)

Figure 7: % of respondents who cited these training needs

Soft skills training emerged as the most needed program across both the age groups followed by support for exam preparation as presented in Figure 7 above.

5. A hybrid model of engagement is necessitated by lack of agency in using technology tools, a recurring preference for offline training modes and need for greater mobility for girls

Majority of the girls in the age group 14-25 don't have freedom of mobility. This limits their access to exposure, compared to boys in the community. Women need additional support to learn negotiation skills and street-smartness compared to men

a. While access to technology is increasing, **the permitted use of such devices is still restricted,** along with lack of appreciation on how to utilise these tools to achieve aspirations.

17% respondents said they are dependent on their family members/neighbors to access internet and technology

30% respondents were either unsure of the role of social media in achieving their goal or were certain that it plays no role

15% respondents cities like Nashik and Kolkata felt technology has no role to play in achieving their goals

5% respondents had no access to internet

Figure 8: Findings on technology use among respondents

b. Interestingly, data showed that despite the pandemic, girls and women have preferred offline training modules, as displayed in Figure 9 below:
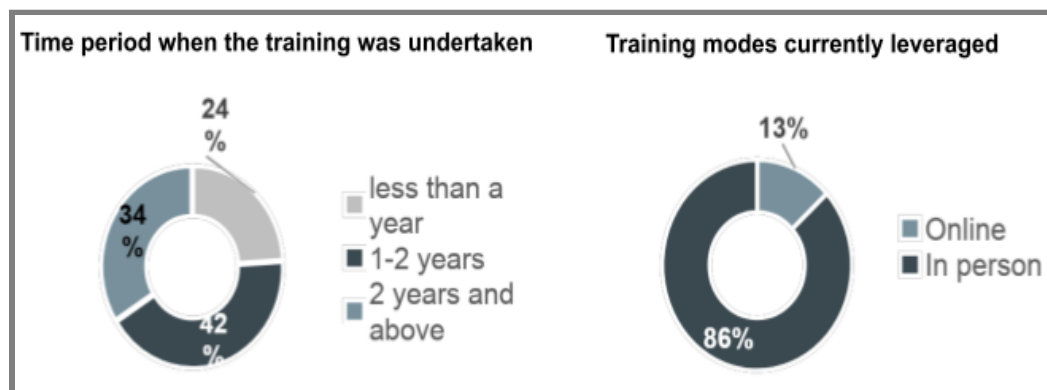

Figure 9: Respondents usage of technology during the pandemic

Key Insights for Programme Development

For those seeking to develop programmes to work with girls and women across the country, some useful and interesting insights emerged from our study as presented below:

Figure 10: Additional Key insights that emerged from the study

Conclusion

It is important to remember that 'self-identity' is a cross-cutting lens and not a separate end in itself. A journey towards building self-identity for girls and young women is influenced by, and in turn has an impact on the beneficiary's socio-economic, emotional, health and other contextual realities. For the beneficiary herself, it is a change in perspective from being reactive and only thinking of short-term needs to being more proactive and being able to dream of more aspirational goals and access related opportunities towards achieving the same.

For philanthropists looking to help support in building identity and agency amongst women, centering self-identity and measuring whether it has been unlocked is a complex and slow process. However, as mentioned in Figure 9 above, it is the key building block to any successful program working with girls and young women.